

The crisp sound of punches echoed in the forest, reverberating through the trees like a symphony of controlled destruction. Each strike met the unforgiving boulders with precision and force, sending shards of rock flying into the air. The impact was powerful but measured, the sound perfectly balanced-loud enough to assert dominance, yet quiet enough to avoid drawing attention from the distant world beyond the lake cabin.

The cabin sat nestled near the edge of the lake, surrounded by towering pines swaying gently in the breeze. The glassy surface of the water mirrored the soft hues of the evening sky, casting an otherworldly glow over the secluded clearing.

Kelly stood a few feet away, perched on the porch steps of the weathered old cabin, her laughter carrying through the forest like music.



"Woohoo, babe! Just like I told you-perfect!" she cheered, her hands cupped around her mouth as if amplifying her voice.

Ahnaf pivoted smoothly, his fist connecting with another massive boulder, reducing it to rubble in an instant. He leapt effortlessly toward a larger rock, landing with grace before driving his foot into it. The boulder shattered, sending a fine mist of dust cascading into the air.

"Agghh, yes, right!" Ahnaf replied, his voice filled with mock exasperation as he wiped a hand across his forehead.

Kelly twirled her hair playfully, tilting her head with a teasing grin. "See? You're so strong!"

Ahnaf chuckled, flexing his arms theatrically. "Haha, this is nothing. Only because I'm holding back, you know. I wouldn't want to scare the forest wildlife away."

"Yeah, yeah, we've all heard that one before. You've been saying it all week already!" Kelly shot back, placing her hands on her hips in mock indignation.

"Well, it's true," Ahnaf replied, smirking as he brushed some stray rock dust off his shirt.

Kelly sauntered closer, her eyes sparkling mischievously. "Why didn't you go with Eric to train with the government? You know, their fancy facilities and all?"

Ahnaf turned toward her, his expression softening. He leaned against the remains of a broken boulder, catching his breath as the golden rays of the setting sun highlighted his confident smirk.

"Don't you see?" he said, gesturing around them. "I've got everything I need right here."



Kelly's cheeks flushed a light pink as she folded her arms. "Owwww, flattery, Mister! You're going to make me blush!"

Ahnaf laughed, stepping toward her. "Just stating the facts. Why would I need to train anywhere else when I've got the best cheerleader and coach right here?"

Kelly swatted his arm lightly, her laughter bubbling up again. "Oh, stop! You're just saying that because I made you those sandwiches earlier!"

"Maybe," Ahnaf admitted with a playful shrug. "But I mean it. This? This feels right. No fancy tech or government agents breathing down my neck-just me, you, and that lake."

Kelly leaned closer, poking his chest with a finger. "And don't forget those boulders you keep destroying! Poor things never saw it coming."

Ahnaf smirked, glancing at the shattered rocks around them. "They should've known better than to challenge me."

Kelly giggled, shaking her head. "Same old Ahnaf. Cocky as ever."

"Confident," Ahnaf corrected, his grin widening.

"Cocky," Kelly countered, her eyes narrowing playfully.

They both broke into laughter, the sound filling the forest and blending with the rustle of the trees and the gentle lapping of the lake water.

It felt like a moment from a year ago, back when our powers were new and the world still felt vast and filled with possibility. There they were-Ahnaf and Kelly-training near the same old abandoned cabin her uncle had left behind, finding joy in the simplicity of being together.

Ahnaf grinned at Kelly and suddenly, without warning, he scooped her up in his arms.

"Woah, Mister! What are you-" Kelly's words were cut off as she was lifted off the ground, her surprise turning into laughter almost instantly.

But Ahnaf's balance faltered as he took a step forward. His foot caught on a hidden rock, and before either of them could react, they both tumbled to the ground, landing with a soft thud. Leaves crunched under them as their laughter filled the air.

"WOOOOOOOOO!" Ahnaf howled between bursts of laughter, his face lighting up with the joy of the moment.

Kelly, still laughing, slapped her hand on his chest as she tried to steady herself. "Hahah! Aww, Ahnaf... clumsy as ever!"

He grinned, rolling over slightly so he could prop himself up on one arm. His hand moved gently to Kelly's cheek, brushing a few strands of hair away as he gazed down at her with a soft intensity.

"That's how I've fallen for you," Ahnaf said, his voice rich with affection, his touch warm and tender as he caressed her face.

Kelly's smile softened, her eyes sparkling as she reached out to lightly touch his chest. "Maybe I am clumsy too, then?" she teased, a playful glint dancing in her eyes. She leaned in closer, inch by inch, until their faces were just a breath apart.

Ahnaf's heart raced, a mixture of affection and a deep, unspoken connection flowing between them. He couldn't help but smile at the thought of it. "What did I ever do to deserve you?" he murmured, his voice low and vulnerable.

Kelly, her breath catching in the stillness of the moment, pressed herself even closer, their breaths mingling in the warm air. Her eyes fluttered closed, the world around them narrowing down to just the two of them, in that quiet, perfect space.

"Nothing..." she whispered, her voice soft, a smile playing at the corner of her lips as she closed the final gap.

Their lips met-tentative at first, then more assured, as if they'd both been waiting for this moment for far too long. The kiss was gentle at first, tender, but with each passing second, the world around them seemed to fade away. Time stretched, and in that instant, they were the only two souls in the universe, wrapped in a moment of connection that was as natural as it was beautiful.

The kiss deepened, slow and intimate, as they shared a piece of themselves that only they would ever understand. It felt like everything fell into place-no battles, no worries, no pressures-just them, together.



When they finally pulled away, they stayed close, foreheads resting against each other, eyes closed, as they shared a quiet breath. The warmth of the moment lingered, and for just a little while, it was as if the entire world had stopped moving.

Ahnaf chuckled, brushing his thumb lightly over Kelly's cheek. "But what do you mean, nothing? I must've done something to charm you, right?"

Kelly laughed, a playful twinkle in her eyes. "Ha! You weren't capable of it," she teased, but her lips curled into a grin that showed no malice, only affection.

"HEY!" Ahnaf protested, shaking his head. "What do you mean, not capable? I had to be charming somehow!"

Kelly smirked, her eyes narrowing slightly as she looked at him with a playful expression. "Do you remember the first time we met? You kept sitting at that school bench, staring at me like a stalker!" She raised an eyebrow. "You never said anything, just watched me. I had to make the first move."

Ahnaf's face turned crimson, and he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. "I wasn't stalking you! I was... well, I was thinking of what to say."

Kelly's laughter filled the air. "Thinking? You never said a word! But I'll give you credit, at least you looked cute while doing it," she teased, poking him in the side. "Then Eric came over and told me that you were just trying to figure out how to ask me out. It wasn't until Eric spoke up that I knew you even wanted to talk to me!"

Ahnaf groaned, his embarrassment deepening. "Ugh, can we please move past that? I didn't want to seem like a fool, okay?"

Kelly smiled and shook her head. "Well, that awkward moment turned into something special, didn't it? I mean, after all, we're here now." She nudged him gently, her eyes softening with affection. "But you know, there was more. I had to give you a ton of hints after that, remember?"

Ahnaf blinked in confusion. "Hints? What hints?"

Kelly raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms over her chest as she tapped her foot playfully. "Oh, you don't remember? Like that one time when I wore that dress, and you stared at it for ten minutes without saying a word." She laughed softly, recalling the memory. "I literally had to tell you, 'You know, you could say something like, 'You look nice today,'' to get you to notice I was waiting for a compliment."

Ahnaf's face grew even redder. "I... uh, I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to mess it up."

Kelly's eyes twinkled with humor. "And what about that time when I baked you those cookies, and you just stared at them like I handed you a plate of rocks?" She leaned in closer to him, her voice teasing. "You just said, 'Yeah, thanks,' and I had to follow up with, 'Well, aren't you going to tell me they're delicious or something?'"

Ahnaf scratched the back of his head, a sheepish grin spreading across his face. "Hey, I'm not the best with words sometimes, alright?"

Kelly leaned back, raising a finger in the air. "And then there was that time you couldn't even hold my hand without shaking like you were holding onto a live wire. I had to literally put your hand in mine and squeeze it just to get you to calm down." Her voice softened, but her smile never wavered. "And after that? You didn't even know how to let go. You kept holding onto my hand like it was the most precious thing in the world."

Ahnaf chuckled nervously. "I wasn't ready for all that... But I wanted to be."

Kelly's expression turned warm and tender, her voice low and affectionate. "You always were ready. Just... a little unsure, you know?" She reached up to brush a lock of hair behind his ear, her fingers lingering on his cheek. "And that was okay. I loved seeing you work through it. Slowly, step by step. You were scared, but you kept going, and that's what made it so perfect."

Ahnaf smiled, his confidence returning as he reached up to gently cup her face in his hand. "Well, you kept giving me hints. Eventually, I had to get it right, didn't I?"

Kelly smirked, nudging him with her shoulder. "Oh, you were so cute back then, though. So unsure of yourself. I couldn't resist giving you those little nudges." She winked at him, her voice soft and teasing. "And look at you now, all confident and charming."

Ahnaf grinned, his confidence returning as he leaned closer to her, his hand resting gently on her waist. "Well, I had a pretty good teacher," he said with a wink, his tone smooth and playful.

Kelly rolled her eyes but smiled warmly at him. "You sure did," she replied, her voice sweet as she met his gaze, her heart swelling with affection for the man she had come to love. "But I think it was worth it in the end."

Ahnaf's smile softened, his hand brushing against her cheek as he gazed at her with a tenderness that matched her own. "It was definitely worth it," he whispered, his voice low and sincere.

For a moment, they just stayed there, close and comfortable, their hearts speaking in a language that words couldn't capture. And in that quiet, perfect space, the world seemed to slow, leaving just the two of them-together.

Kelly furrowed her brow as she watched Ahnaf with a mixture of concern and confusion. The soft rustling of the trees and the distant sounds of the forest seemed to fade as her focus honed in on him. Her voice was gentle, but there was an edge of worry that cut through.

"But Ahnaf, are you sure staying here with me, with your mom, is all you want? The training at the facility could really help you get ready for the battle next month. You're stronger than ever, but you need to keep pushing. You can't take this lightly."

Ahnaf smiled, though there was a tiredness in his eyes. He shook his head slightly. "I know, Kelly. But I've found a better way."

She leaned in, her curiosity piqued, her eyes bright. "A better way? What are you talking about?"

He paused for a moment, letting the words hang in the air before answering with a quiet confidence. "Thanks to you, I found it."

Kelly raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Oh, come on, don't leave me hanging like that. What's the secret?"

Ahnaf chuckled softly before his expression shifted, turning serious. "Remember what I told you about Code Breaker?"

Kelly's eyes widened as she processed his words. "Yeah, I remember. That sounds... absolutely insane."

He nodded slowly, his tone steady. "Well, I've achieved that again when I left the facility last week."

Kelly blinked, stunned. "What?! You're telling me you've been *in* that state again? But... you look completely normal."

Ahnaf turned to face her, his gaze filled with a mix of pride and something darker. "I figured out what triggers it. It's you, Kelly. It's everyone I love, everyone I want to protect. Leonis helped me understand the basics of it, and... well, I did it."

Kelly stared at him, her mind racing. "You're saying that you triggered this... because of me?"

Ahnaf hesitated for a moment, his face softening. "Yeah, I guess. But there's more. I didn't know if it would trigger again at all, so... I didn't let go of it."

Kelly furrowed her brow, her confusion growing. "Wait, what do you mean you didn't let go of it?"

Ahnaf's voice was quiet but firm. "I've been holding back. I'm still in that state, but I'm controlling it. I'm limiting my original strength to allow Code Breaker to act as my baseline."

Kelly's breath caught in her throat as she processed his words. "WHAT! So, you're saying... you're *holding back* all of your power right now, and you're still able to perform like this? How is that possible?"

Ahnaf gave her a grim smile. "It's not easy. But yeah, that's the idea. And if I let go of that control... well, everything changes."

Kelly's eyes widened as she realized the severity of the situation. "What do you mean, everything changes? What happens if you let go of it?"

Ahnaf's voice lowered, almost a whisper. "If I let go of the control, this entire forest... it'd be destroyed in a single punch."

Kelly's eyes went wide in shock. "Oh my God... you're like a ticking time bomb!"

Ahnaf's smile was rueful, but his voice was calm, reassuring. "Hey, don't worry about it. I know how to control it. It's just... lately, it's been harder."

"Harder to control?" Kelly echoed, her concern deepening. "What do you mean? What's happening?"

Ahnaf's gaze turned distant, as if he were weighing his words. "Before, I only had to assert maybe 50% of my original strength just to do basic things-like picking up groceries, fixing things around the house. But now..." He trailed

off, his expression hardening. "Now, I only need to assert about 20% to do the same things. And it's... it's becoming harder to control."

Kelly's heart skipped a beat as she realized the gravity of the situation. "Wait, so you're saying that you're getting stronger on the base? By putting all this pressure on yourself just to *hold it back*?"

Ahnaf nodded slowly, a quiet intensity in his eyes. "Yeah that's the idea I guess. And every day, it gets harder to keep it in check. I'm not sure how much longer I can manage this without something breaking."

Kelly's chest tightened with concern. She reached out and grabbed his hand, her grip tight and steady. "Ahnaf... this isn't just about getting stronger anymore. You're pushing yourself to the limit-your body can't handle that much pressure forever. You're putting everything you have into controlling this, and you don't even know what the cost will be if it gets out of hand."

Ahnaf's expression grew more determined as he processed his own words. "If I'm doing this correctly," he continued, a confident edge to his voice, "then I'm getting stronger every day. And if my strongest was able to reach just 10% of Khan's strength with Code Breaker, then... by next month, I could actually go toe to toe with him."

Kelly's face softened with concern, but there was a glimmer of pride in her eyes. "Are you sure you're okay with all of this, Ahnaf? You've been pushing yourself so hard. I don't want you to burn out."

He turned to face her, his gaze unwavering. "I'm fine, Kelly. I feel stronger than ever. And..." He paused for a moment, his voice softening, "I love you."

Kelly's heart skipped a beat as she gazed at him, her hand instinctively reaching for his. "I love you too, Ahnaf. But you don't have to do this alone, you know? I'm here for you, always."

Ahnaf smiled and squeezed her hand gently, his voice full of warmth. "I know, Kelly. I couldn't ask for anyone better to stand by my side. You've always been there for me, and that's what keeps me going."

Kelly chuckled lightly, her cheeks flushing as she playfully bumped into his shoulder. "Well, I hope you don't think I'm just going to sit back. I'm ready for whatever comes next."

Ahnaf chuckled as well, a hint of relief in his voice. "I wouldn't dream of it. You're part of this journey with me, Kelly. You always have been."

The air between them was warm with shared understanding, the evening light casting a soft glow as they stood in the quiet forest. Slowly, they began walking side by side, the path ahead uncertain but the comfort of each other's presence undeniable.

Kelly grinned, squeezing his hand once more. "So, what's the plan now?"

Ahnaf looked over at her, his eyes glinting with affection. "Now? Now we go home."

They walked in comfortable silence for a few moments, the sounds of the forest settling around them as the sun dipped lower. Kelly's thoughts lingered on the words they had shared, but she felt a deep sense of peace with Ahnaf by her side.

The evening air was cool, but it was the warmth between them that kept the chill at bay. Together, they walked hand in hand, heading back to the comfort of home, knowing that whatever came next, they would face it together.



With each step, the bond between them felt stronger, the future uncertain but full of promise. And as they walked into the night, they knew one thing for certain—they were not alone. They had each other.

The Nexus Facility

Back at the Nexus Facility, the hall was a scene of chaos—broken objects scattered across the floor, some of them sparking faintly with remnants of electricity. The air hummed with residual energy from the training equipment, the faint smell of ozone lingering like a storm had just passed.

In the center of the massive, enclosed hall stood the Blur. Yeah, that's me.

The room was eerily silent for a moment, save for my steady breaths, the calm before the storm. Then, without warning, from all four directions, mechanical devices embedded in the walls activated, each releasing a glowing, orb-like projectile.

In an instant, I felt it—the warm gust of air pushing outward as the orbs shot toward me with incredible speed, their paths laced with faint green streaks of light. My eyes flickered to each one, the world slowing down as my perception stretched.

I didn't move at first. Instead, I stood my ground, feeling the adrenaline surge through me. Then, with a sharp sonic boom, I was gone, a green afterimage of myself left lingering in the center.

The orbs halted midair, suspended like a pause button had been pressed. Their trajectories were broken by the sheer speed of my intervention.

I reappeared at the edges of the hall, standing next to one of the orbs. My hand rested lightly on its smooth surface. In less than a heartbeat, I darted again, another sonic boom trailing behind me as the displaced air rippled in green streaks. The sound of my movement echoed throughout the room, and the remaining orbs froze just inches from their release points.

I stopped back in the middle of the room, panting but exhilarated.



"Woah... huff, puff... that was... faster than before!" I said, grinning to myself.

I looked around, taking in the sight. Each of the glowing orbs was now perfectly pinned in place-each one stopped right at the point of emergence from the walls. The precision was exhilarating, a testament to how far I'd come.

Mach 3 speed. I'd achieved it.

The past few days had been grueling. Countless drills, running until my legs gave out, pushing my perception and reaction times to their limits. But this moment, standing amidst the halted chaos I'd created, made it all worth it.

The comms buzzed to life in the corner of the room, Leonis's deep, calm voice crackling through the speakers.

Leonis: "You okay, kid? You've been at it since the morning," he asked, his tone lined with concern.

I wiped the sweat from my brow, my chest heaving as I caught my breath. The sparking remains of the halted orbs still hovered around me, a testament to the intensity of the session.

Me: "I'm fine, Mr. Leonis! Let's go again. Have 'em throw more at me!" I said, my voice breathless but filled with determination.

There was a pause, the faint sound of typing or flipping papers on the other end. Then his voice came back, tinged with worry.

Leonis: "Maybe take a rest, Eric. You're pushing yourself harder than anyone here, and believe me, that's saying something," he suggested, his words deliberate.

I grinned despite the ache in my muscles, already repositioning myself in the center of the room. My stance was solid, ready for the next barrage.

Me: "No way, Mr. Leonis! Not until I reach Code Breaker again!" I declared, shaking out my hands as green sparks began to flicker faintly around them.

Leonis: "Forcing it isn't going to make it happen, kid. Code Breaker isn't something you can strong-arm into existence. You know that," he said, his tone carrying both frustration and understanding.

I rolled my shoulders, cracking my neck as I shot back with a smirk.

Me: "Well then, I guess I'll just enforce it, huh? Haha," I quipped, unable to hide the defiance in my voice.

Leonis: "Hah, kids. You remind me of myself back in the day, except... well, less reckless. You're going to wear yourself out if you keep this up," he warned, though there was a touch of amusement in his voice.

I clenched my fists, the green sparks of my speed intensifying slightly as I responded.

Me: "That's the point, right? If I stop now, what was all this for? I'm not just doing this for me, Mr. Leonis. I'm doing this for them-for Ahnaf, for Kelly, for... for everyone who needs me to be faster. Stronger. Better," I said, my voice steady, though a hint of desperation slipped through.

There was silence on the other end, a heavy pause. When Leonis spoke again, his tone was softer, almost fatherly.

Leonis: "Eric, I get it. You've got a good heart, and your drive... it's inspiring. But even the fastest man alive can't outrun exhaustion. You're no use to anyone if you burn yourself out," he said, the concern in his voice thick enough to weigh on my chest.

I tightened my jaw, staring at the glowing orbs around me.

Me: "I know my limits, Mr. Leonis. And I know I haven't reached them yet. Please, just one more round," I insisted, my voice unwavering.

Leonis sighed again, the sound carrying a mix of resignation and admiration.

Leonis: "Fine. One more round. But after this, you're taking a break, even if I have to drag you out of there myself," he relented, though his tone carried a hint of teasing.

I smirked, my stance lowering as I prepared for the next wave.

Me: "Deal. Let's make it a tough one," I said, a spark of excitement in my voice.

Leonis: "You asked for it, kid. Just... don't make me regret this," he replied, the tension in his voice slightly easing.

The hum of the training system roared to life again, the room dimming slightly as the orbs powered up. Their glow intensified, and this time, there were more of them-faster, erratic, unpredictable.

I planted my feet, my body humming with anticipation.

Me: "Alright, Blur. Let's show 'em what Mach 3 looks like," I muttered to myself, a grin tugging at my lips.

As the first orb launched, I vanished in a burst of green light, the sonic boom shaking the room. The world slowed to a crawl as I darted between the orbs, stopping each one in its tracks with pinpoint precision.

Leonis's voice came through the comms again, quieter this time, almost to himself.

Leonis: "Hah. Kids these days. They'll probably surpass us all, won't they?" he murmured, his tone filled with a mix of pride and nostalgia.

And with that, I pushed harder, determined to prove him right.

A Few Weeks Go By

The next couple of days took off like a Blur... heh, Blur. While Ahnaf was spending time with Kelly and his mom, I was out here at the Nexus Facility, pushing myself to the limit. Sure, we were busy with our own things, but we still managed to meet up a couple of times during the weekends. Those moments felt like an oasis in the middle of all the chaos.

One Saturday evening, we were all gathered around the dining table at Ahnaf's house. The smell of homemade food was in the air, the kind of meal you'd expect from a family that really knew how to cook. Kelly, Ahnaf, and I were all laughing, enjoying each other's company.



Kelly raised an eyebrow as she playfully asked, "Alright, come on, Ahnaf. I need to know who's the better cook, you or your mom?"

Ahnaf grinned and wiped his mouth. "Easy. My mom's got years of experience, but I can still whip up a mean pasta when I need to."

I laughed and glanced at him. "I bet you can barely handle a microwave without burning yourself, dude."

Ahnaf mockingly placed a hand over his chest, acting offended. "Watch it, Eric. I'll show you how it's done."

Kelly giggled, raising an eyebrow. "Maybe you should cook us all a five-course meal one day, Ahnaf. Just to prove it."

Ahnaf smirked as he shrugged. "You're on, Kelly. But only if Eric handles the dessert. I don't trust him near the stove with that kind of responsibility."

Mockingly hurt, I colored my voice. "I'm offended! I make a mean chocolate cake, thank you very much."

Kelly burst into laughter as Ahnaf elbowed me playfully in the side. It was the kind of easy moment that made all the hard work worth it.

The following weekend, we decided to take a break from everything. No training, no missions-just a little time to enjoy each other's company. The three of us ventured into the woods, the cool breeze cutting through the trees. The quiet surroundings felt like a sanctuary.

Kelly sighed happily, taking a deep breath. "This is exactly what I needed. Nature, no distractions, and... well, no evil robots trying to kill us."

I grinned, looking around. "Yeah, no interdimensional threats either. Just... trees. And squirrels."

Ahnaf pointed at a squirrel hopping nearby and chuckled. "If that squirrel tries to challenge me, I'll show it who's boss."

Kelly laughed and shot back, "Ahnaf, please. You couldn't outrun a squirrel if it had a head start."

Ahnaf scoffed and crossed his arms, acting cocky. "Says the girl who can't even beat me in a race."

Kelly grinned and raised an eyebrow. "Oh, we're doing this again? You know I'm faster than you, right?"

I leaned in, grinning. "I'm just gonna go ahead and say, Kelly, I'm faster than both of you."



Ahnaf scoffed again and shot me a sidelong glance. "Pfft, Eric, you're a cheat. You have... speed powers and all that."

Kelly teased, "Exactly. It's not fair. I bet he's been practicing those powers on the side."

Laughing, I shook my head. "You guys are relentless. Next time, I'm dragging you both into one of these stores and making you try on weird clothes."

Ahnaf nodded eagerly. "Deal. But only if you try on something even weirder. And it has to have a cape. I'm talking full superhero look."

Another day, the three of us wandered through the streets, enjoying a rare lazy Saturday. The city buzzed around us, people moving in every direction, but we took our time. We stopped at random stores, window-shopped, and generally just let the day unfold.

I held up a ridiculous t-shirt I found and grinned. "What do you think? Too much?"

Ahnaf raised an eyebrow. "That is... something. What does it even say? 'World's Fastest Pizza Delivery'? Is that your new career path?"

Kelly giggled, eyeing the shirt. "It's perfect, Eric. You could wear that next time we get into a speed race. It'll be your team uniform."

I mockingly placed my hand on my chest. "What? Are you saying I'm not a champion? I can totally outrun any pizza delivery guy."

Ahnaf teased, "Sure, after you've had a few slices first."



Kelly added playfully, "Maybe you should race that pizza guy. See who gets to the finish line first!"

Later that evening, we decided to go for a late-night drive on Ms Ruvana's Car. The streets were quieter than usual, and the city lights flickered in the distance. Kelly was in the backseat, dancing along to the radio.

She tossed her head back, laughing. "This is the best! I forgot how much fun it is to just go for a drive."

I grinned, leaning against the window. "Yeah, nothing beats the thrill of the road. No speeding ticket... yet."

Ahnaf smirked as he kept his eyes on the road. "I'm still waiting for you to challenge me in a race, Eric."

I raised an eyebrow. "You know I'm not going to race you with a passenger in the car, right?"

Ahnaf laughed and nudged me. "Oh, come on. Live a little."

Kelly slapped Ahnaf's arm playfully. "Don't encourage him. He already thinks he's invincible enough."

I grinned, looking out the window. "Just wait until I break Mach 5. Nothing will be able to catch me ."

Ahnaf shook his head mockingly. "Uh-huh, sure. You keep telling yourself that, Blur."

Each of these moments felt like a breath of normalcy in the midst of everything else. As much as I pushed myself to become faster, stronger, better, there was something special about these weekends. No matter how chaotic our lives became, we always found time to remind ourselves that we were just teenagers. And sometimes, that's all we needed.

The Next Evening

Later that evening, it was the 13th of September. We sat together on Ahnaf's couch, the dim glow of the TV screen lighting up the room as Kelly clicked the remote.

Kelly, playfully glancing at us: "You know, I heard they're going to talk about the events of last month."

Ahnaf, reclining back into the couch, a smirk on his face: "Oh yeah! I totally forgot about the news since we got so busy with all this."

I was leaning forward, excitement dancing in his voice: "No better time than now, right? I bet they'll be parading me and you as heroes. Immortal and Blur! The Defenders of Leeds!"

Just then, the news channel kicked in with its usual upbeat intro, the camera panning to two anchors sitting at a desk in front of the Leeds cityscape backdrop. The title flashed on the screen: *Leeds News Network*.

Anchor Jenna, smiling at the camera: "Welcome back. This is Leeds News, and tonight we're going to talk about the events of last month, a day that will be remembered forever by the people of our great city."

Anchor Samuel, nodding, with a professional yet warm tone: "Thank you, Jenna. Today we'll be discussing that disaster once again-what happened, the aftermath, and of course, how our beloved city is recovering. But first, we want to highlight the incredible acts of bravery that helped protect us all."

Kelly, looking at the screen with a raised eyebrow: "Oh boy, here it comes."



Anchor Jenna, with a slight nod: "Yes, and we send our heartfelt condolences to everyone who lost their loved ones that day. May they find peace and healing."

Samuel, his voice growing more upbeat: "Yes, absolutely. And Jenna, while the disaster was catastrophic, at least we had our heroes there to protect us before things could have gotten even worse."

Ahnaf, leaning forward and speaking confidently: "Well, they're not wrong. We did hold our own."

My eyes went wide with excitement: "They're talking about us! Heroes of Leeds!" I grinned, feeling the rush of pride. "Immortal and Blur. That's us."

Anchor Jenna, with a teasing tone: "So, Samuel, I hear you're referring to our newbie heroes-Immortal and Blur?"

Anchor Samuel, with a confident chuckle: "I wouldn't call them 'newbies,' Jenna. It's been, what-over a year now since they first appeared? They've certainly earned their place among the city's protectors."

Kelly, nodding with a mischievous smile: "See? I told you. You guys are basically celebrities now."

I sat there, grinning ear to ear: "I'll take it! Honestly, I was expecting them to just mention Sentinel. But hey, I'll share the limelight."

Anchor Jenna, tilting her head slightly as she smiled: "Yes, 'newbies' or not, they've managed to hold off one of the most dangerous threats this world has ever seen. How about that muscle-bound guy... what's his name again? Krubs? Kabs? Khuz-"

Anchor Samuel, chuckling at her mix-up: "I think you mean Khan, Jenna."

Jenna, shaking her head, smiling sheepishly: "Yes! Khan, that's it! What a name, right? Sounds royally majestic, doesn't it?"

I started laughing out loud: "Royally majestic? I like that. He's definitely a force to be reckoned with, that's for sure."

Ahnaf, nodding thoughtfully: "He's a monster. But, we're not exactly slouches either. We got the job done."

Anchor Samuel, now serious as the mood shifted: "Yes, the devastation Khan caused was unimaginable. Entire parts of Leeds were left in ruins, and lives were forever changed. But the heroes-Immortal and Blur-held strong, pushing him back, giving the city a fighting chance."

Kelly, quietly to herself, looking at the screen with a soft smile: "We did, didn't we?"

I leaned back with a content smile, as the anchor's words played on: "Feels good to be recognized. But it's not about the fame, right? It's about keeping everyone safe."

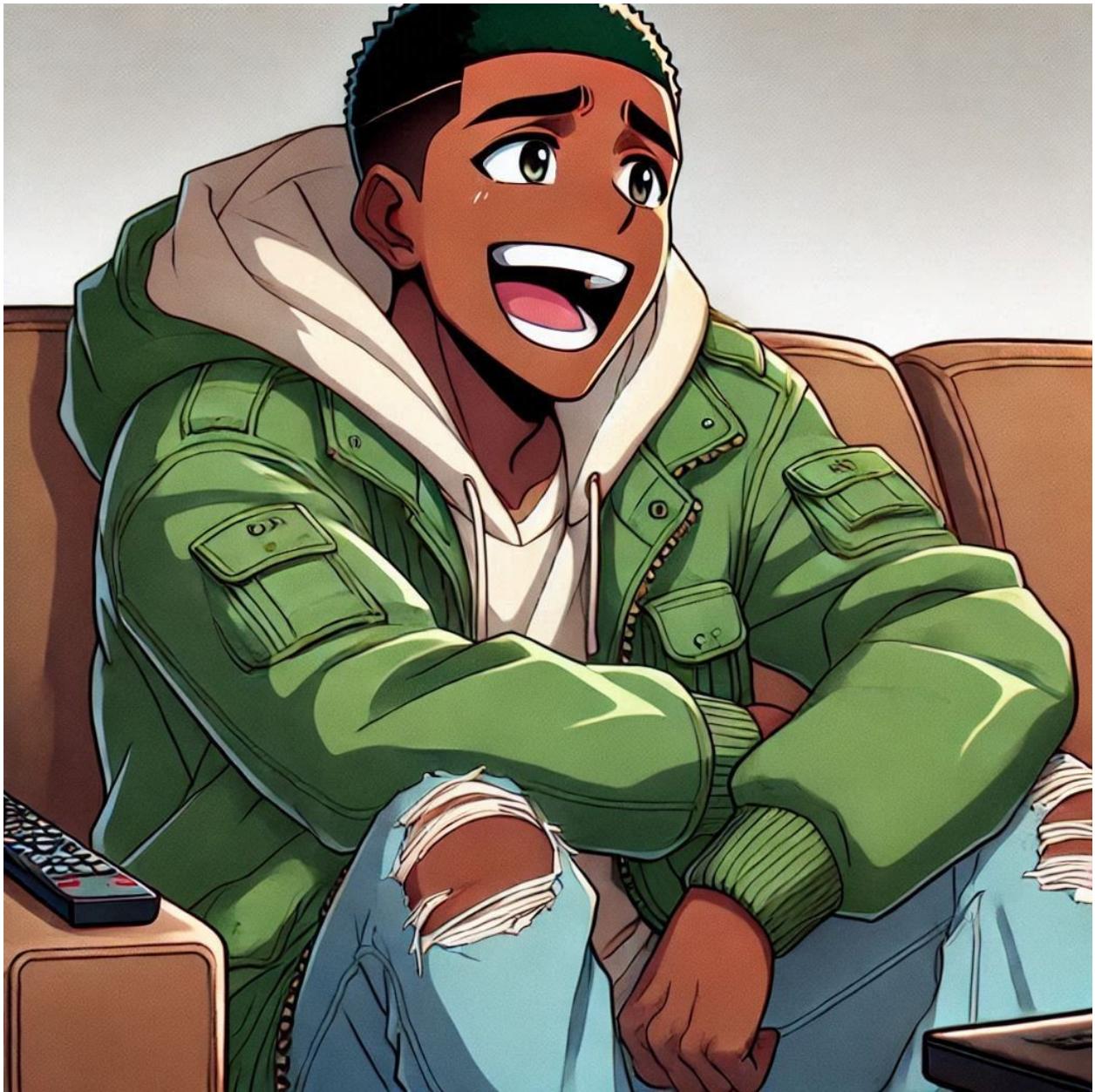
Ahnaf, nudging him with a grin: "Don't get too modest, Eric. You were out there moving faster than anyone could blink. That's gotta count for something."

Kelly, softly teasing, nudging Ahnaf: "Hey, don't forget who saved your skin a few times, Immortal."

Ahnaf chuckled, shrugging with a grin: "I'll admit, I may have needed a little help. But I did my part too."

Anchor Jenna, her tone sympathetic yet resolute: "Though the battle is over, the healing has only just begun. Leeds stands strong, united by the courage of its citizens and its heroes. And as we rebuild, we remember those we lost and honor the bravery of those who stepped up."

I started smiling softly, eyes on the screen: "Yeah. We've got a lot of work to do ahead."



Kelly, squeezing his arm gently: "But we'll do it together, right?"

Ahnaf, giving a reassuring nod: "Of course. Always."

As the news segment continued, things took an unexpected turn.

Samuel, with a cheeky grin: "Are we forgetting someone?"

Jenna, raising an eyebrow: "Who? You mean the Sentinel? Of course-"

Samuel, cutting her off with a playful tone: "Hush, hush, Jenna. Way to ruin everything! Ahem. We're talking about the golden-haired man in the magician outfit."

Jenna, looking confused for a moment, then snapping her fingers: "Ahhh, the electric man?"

Samuel, pausing with a confused expression: "Is that... is that what they're calling him?"

Ahnaf, looking at the TV, smirking: "Waaaa, that's lame. He's the Nullifier."

Kelly, laughing softly: "I love how you've got the name all figured out already."

Jenna, her voice filled with intrigue: "Yes ! The mysterious electric man who made balls of lightning and fire..."

Samuel, raising an eyebrow: "Hey, wait a second. He's making lightning *and* fire, then why is he called the Electric Man?"

Jenna, shrugging nonchalantly: "I don't know, Samuel. People are naming him that way since he never showed up to tell his name in the first place."

Ahnaf, chuckling at the absurdity: "But, like... fire and electricity? Doesn't make sense. He should be called something cooler."

Samuel, sighing in frustration: "But like... he makes fire too, so it makes zero sense-"

Jenna, cutting him off with a smirk: "Do you also argue when dragons have two legs instead of four but are still called dragons?"

Samuel, looking taken aback, blinking for a moment: "Wh... no, of course not."

Jenna, grinning as she leaned forward: "So, the magnificent Electric Man, holding the line of defense all alone against Khan... sounds pretty heroic to me, doesn't it?"

Ahnaf, shaking his head but smiling: "Maybe. But *the Nullifier*? Now that's a name that fits. I mean come on James named himself in front of me!"

Kelly, nudging Eric with a playful look: "You've got that right. But hey, who wouldn't want a name like 'the Nullifier'?"

The conversation continued to buzz, but the focus on the screen kept drawing our attention. The anchors were still talking, but at that moment, we were all just a little too caught up in the absurdity of it all.

Ahnaf, shaking his head in disbelief: "They got most of the events wrong, but well, what can I say? The place was too dangerous for anybody to stay."

Jenna, excitedly shifting her attention to the next segment: "And finally, before we wrap it up, we would like to bring out the man of the hour, the legend, the myt-"

Samuel, cutting her off with a serious tone: "Not a myth, Jenna, not a myth. He is very real."

Jenna, throwing up her hands in frustration: "WOULD YOU STOP!"

Samuel, quickly backtracking: "..... Sorry..."

Kelly, laughing as she shook her head: "Haha, I can't believe this is news."

Jenna, brushing off the interruption with a sly smile: "I would like to bring out... the Sentinel."

As the words left her mouth, the door to the studio opened. There, standing in the doorway with his usual grey outfit and flowing cape, was the Sentinel. He had a confident smirk plastered on his face as he stepped into the room, as if the whole world should be applauding him.

Ahnaf's hands tightened into fists, his knuckles turning white. "THAT PIECE OF SHIT."

My tone a mix of disgust and quiet frustration: "Yeah, I know..."

Sentinel stood in front of the cameras, basking in the attention, his gaze sweeping across the studio as if he were the center of the universe. He looked every bit the part of a hero, though I could tell it was all an act, a carefully crafted illusion. But Ahnaf, well, his anger was palpable, his body stiff with tension.



Sentinel: "Hi folks, how are you all?"

Jenna, smiling brightly: "We're absolutely fantastic, and how are you!"

Sentinel, with a smug grin: "Hehe, I was telling that to the audience, but good to know regardless."

Samuel, looking impressed: "So, the Sentinel, right here in the flesh... You alone were the only one capable of stopping Khan that day, I believe the last time you faced him was 20 years ago, right? Back when you first started being a superhero?"

Ahnaf, with a knowing look on his face: "He's not wrong though. Only Sentinel was able to stop Khan in the end."

Sentinel, puffing out his chest: "Ah yes, exactly correct... hehe, what did you expect? I am the strongest being on this planet. Khan stood no chance."

Kelly, crossing her arms and rolling her eyes: "Pfft, talk about a humble brag."

I leaned forward, his eyes wide with excitement: "Did he just say he's the strongest? Guess we know who's got the ego around here."

Jenna, with a raised eyebrow: "Well, some people say that you claimed that last time as well, and yet Khan remained alive. Are you sure that you were able to finish him off this time?"

Sentinel, forcing a laugh: "Heh, and I say those people are foo-" he catches himself, quickly covering it up. "-forgetting that no matter how strong he was back then... I stopped him then, I stopped him now."

Ahnaf, smirking under his breath: "You sure about that?"

Jenna, pushing the issue further: "Yeah, but where is Khan now?"

Sentinel, his smile faltering slightly, then regaining his confidence: "What do you mean, where he is? I killed him."

Ahnaf, shaking his head in disbelief: "Now that's a lie."

Jenna, looking genuinely curious: "Oh? Is he really dead though? What if he comes ba-"

Sentinel, a sinister grin creeping across his face: "From the dead? I'll kill him all over again... again and again, *AGA/N AND AGA/N UNTIL YOU ARE SATISFIED!*"



Samuel, nervously laughing: "Oh, sorry, we didn't mean to--"

Sentinel, suddenly laughing maniacally: "OH... hahah... just a joke! Joke joke! We all can have fun, see?"

Jenna, pretending to be startled but clearly trying to cover up her unease: "Oh, hah, I was sure for a moment..."

I whispered to Ahnaf, wide-eyed: "Did he really just go full villain mode there? That was a bit... much."

Ahnaf, smirking: "Classic Sentinel. He loves the attention, and he loves playing the part."

Kelly, giggling at how over the top it all was: "He's like a superhero with a villain's ego. I almost feel sorry for him."

The awkward silence in the room was broken only by the sound of Samuel trying to get back on track. But it was clear-Sentinel was enjoying the spotlight, and as far as he was concerned, no one could touch him.

But then Samuel leaned forward, clasping his hands as he grinned at Sentinel. "But what would you say about our own superheroes? Haha."

Sentinel smirked, brushing imaginary dust off his grey cape. "What's there to say about them? Like I said last time, they're adrenaline junkies. They've probably taken some kind of special drug to get that powerful."

Jenna raised an eyebrow. "Even if they did... well, they still protected us until you arrived. If they didn't-

Sentinel cut her off with a cold glare. "If they didn't, then I would have arrived sooner."

Ahnaf crossed his arms, leaning back on the couch. "Yeah, sure. Because that's exactly how it happened," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

I sat forward, excitement brimming in his tone. "Man, this guy's ego has its own gravitational pull. I kind of admire how committed he is to the act."

Kelly giggled, shaking her head. "It's like he's reading from a script and still managing to make it worse."

Samuel hesitated but pressed on. "But, uh, from what we've seen on video, we saw you crashing down with Khan in hand from the sky, in a ball of fire. If that hit us, the city would have been completely destroyed."

Sentinel shrugged nonchalantly. "And it didn't."

Jenna nodded firmly. "Well, that's because one of our heroes-the electric man-created a sphere of energy over the entire city to take most of the force of the blast."

Sentinel let out a loud, dismissive laugh. "Haha, yes, I already anticipated that, which is why I did what I did. I always prevail."

Ahnaf tightened his jaw, his voice low and steady. "That's a total lie. He didn't care about the city. He was ready to let it all burn just to take down Khan."

I nudged Ahnaf playfully. "You're not wrong, but watching him spin this is better than any reality show."

Kelly tilted her head thoughtfully. "Do you think he even believes himself at this point? Like, is he actually convinced or just hoping we are?"

Jenna, addressing the camera, smiled warmly. "Regardless, we can't overlook the efforts of our other heroes. The electric man, Immortal, and Blur-

Sentinel's smile vanished as he leaned forward, his tone sharp. "Oh, please! What efforts? They're just lucky amateurs with flashy tricks! If it weren't for me, Leeds would have been wiped off the map!"

Samuel, shifting nervously, tried to steer the conversation. "But Immortal and Blur were the first responders. They evacuated civilians and held off Khan long enough for you to-

Sentinel's voice boomed, cutting Samuel off. "I SAID THEY'RE AMATEURS."

Ahnaf sat up straighter, his voice calm but biting. "Funny. Those 'amateurs' managed to keep things together while you were busy making your grand entrance."

I grinned, my eyes gleaming with mischief. "Yeah, and let's not forget about 'the electric man'-who, by the way, has a name: The Nullifier. James literally saved the city with that energy barrier."

Kelly smiled softly. "And he is in coma now because of that."



Sentinel stood abruptly, his cape swirling around him as his voice rose. "Enough! If everyone loves these so-called heroes so much, then next time a threat emerges—" he pointed directly at the camera, his eyes blazing, "-go ask *your own heroes* to save you!"

Without another word, Sentinel shot upward, smashing through the studio roof in an explosion of debris. The cameras wobbled as Jenna and Samuel scrambled to keep their composure.

Jenna stared at the gaping hole in the ceiling, her voice shaky. "Well... that was... unexpected."

Samuel adjusted his tie awkwardly. "I, uh, guess we hit a nerve."

Ahnaf crossed his arms, shaking his head. "That man's nothing but an egotistical maniac. He doesn't care about anyone but himself."

I leaned back, a grin stretching across my face. "I mean, sure, he's a jerk, but watching him storm off like that? Kind of worth it."

Kelly giggled, her voice light. "And now we know he's not as good under pressure as he likes to pretend. That's something, right?"

Ahnaf leaned back on the couch, a confident smirk tugging at his lips. "And at the very least... we now know that he won't be coming on 22nd September."

I chuckled, stretching my arms behind my head. "Guess we're all on our own, huh?"

Ahnaf nodded firmly. "Exactly. We don't need his theatrics or his ego weighing us down."

I grinned, glancing at my friends. "Just us, Immortal, Blur, and... maybe Nullifier too, if he wakes up from his coma."

Kelly tilted her head, her voice soft but hopeful. "He will. When the time comes, he'll be there."

Ahnaf smirked again, a determined glint in his eye. "We'll see. Either way, we're not backing down. The city's counting on us."

I couldn't help but laugh lightly, the weight of the conversation balanced by the warmth of our camaraderie. "Well, let's just hope we get a break before it all kicks off again. I'm not ready to explain to Leonis why I skipped training today."

Kelly laughed, shaking her head. "You? Skip training? Now that's a headline."

Ahnaf chuckled along. "Blur misses practice? The world must really be ending."

The laughter lingered in the room for a moment, a brief escape from the looming date ahead. Whatever came next, we knew we'd face it together-whether or not the Nullifier, or even Sentinel, decided to join the fight.

A Few More Days Pass

The days ticked by like a countdown, each one heavier than the last. September 22 loomed closer, its shadow stretching over everything. The air felt different, tense, like a tightly coiled spring waiting to snap.

I threw myself into training at the Nexus Facility, pushing harder with every session. Speed drills, combat maneuvers, honing my focus-it all blurred together in a mix of exhaustion and determination. I had to be ready. There was no room for error.

Meanwhile, Ahnaf and Kelly went everyday to the lake cabin. He didn't tell me much about his training, only that he needed the space and the isolation. I trusted him. I always did. If anyone could rise to this challenge, it was Ahnaf. He had a quiet strength, an unshakable resolve, and I knew he'd come back stronger than ever-maybe even strong enough to take Khan down for good. Our lives depended on it.

Still, doubt lingered in the back of my mind. James hadn't woken up. The Nullifier, our ace in the hole, was still out of commission. Every time I passed his room in the infirmary, I couldn't help but glance inside, hoping to see some sign of movement. But the machines hummed steadily, the room as silent as ever.

One afternoon at the facility, I caught a glimpse of Ms. Tiffany and Lt. Cheng. They moved quickly, focused, like people with a mission. I barely had time to call out before they vanished down a corridor. Later, I asked Leonis about them.

"They're back from Nepal," he said, adjusting his glasses. "Helping Ramsey in the Heartlands. Don't worry about them. They have their roles to play, just like you do."

Everyone had their part in this. Some were out in the field, others behind the scenes. And then there was us-the ones who'd stand on the front lines when the clock struck

Night Before Judgement

The night of September 21 arrived with an eerie stillness. The usual hum of the Nexus facility felt muted, the halls dimly lit. Outside, the moon hung low in the sky, casting long shadows over the facility. I sat in the common area, staring at the clock on the wall. It was 10 PM, each tick of the second hand echoing like a heartbeat. My mind drifted to Ahnaf. I hoped he was holding up better than I was.

The Suburbs

"Ahnaf," Ruvana called softly from the kitchen doorway.

Ahnaf turned, a gentle smile tugging at his lips as he set down his training gloves. "Yes, Mom?"

Her voice trembled, her eyes glistening as she walked over to him. "I won't stop you... because I know what you'll be doing tomorrow is to see me smile again. To give us all hope again."

Ahnaf's smile deepened, though his eyes softened with understanding. He stepped closer, placing his hands on her shoulders. "And I'd do that all over again in a heartbeat, just for you, Mom. No matter who I am, no matter what I become... you'll always be my mother. I love you more than anything in this world, and I'd fight through everything-everything-if it means keeping you safe."

Her composure broke, tears spilling over as she pulled him into a tight embrace. "And I love you too, my baby boy. Look at you... Look how you've grown. You're going to be nineteen tomorrow. I can't believe the man I've raised-so strong, so brave, but still my little boy."



Kelly, who had been standing silently in the doorway, couldn't hold herself back anymore. She stepped forward, her eyes already misting. "I'm sorry, Ms. Ruvana, but I couldn't resist." She joined their hug, her shoulders shaking as soft sobs escaped her.

Ruvana gently patted Kelly's back, her tone soothing. "Oh, hush, darling. You're part of our family too. You don't need to apologize for anything."

Kelly clung to them, her voice breaking. "I'm scared... I'm so scared, Ahnaf. You know how much I love you, and tomorrow... tomorrow, you have to—"

Ahnaf pulled back slightly, his gaze firm but warm as he cupped Kelly's face in his hands. "Kelly, listen to me. I *have* to do this, yes. But I'm doing it because I want to. Because I love you too. And if keeping you safe means walking into that fight, I'll do it over and over again without hesitation. I will *always* come back to you."

Kelly shook her head, tears streaming freely now. "But what if-what if you don't? What if tomorrow is the last time-"

"It won't be," Ahnaf interrupted gently but firmly. He rested his forehead against hers, his voice steady. "I promise you, Kelly. I *will* come back. I have too much to fight for-too much to live for. For you. For Mom. For all of us."

Ruvana wiped her tears, her voice thick with emotion. "You're so much like your father, Ahnaf. He had that same fire in his heart, that same unshakable will. But even he... he never had to face something like this."

Ahnaf turned to her, his voice soft but resolute. "And because of him, I know what it means to protect the people you love. He taught me that. You taught me that. I'll honor both of you tomorrow. I'll make you proud."

Ruvana hugged him again, holding him as if letting go would shatter her. "You already have, my son. No matter what happens, you'll always be my pride."

Kelly clutched his arm, her voice trembling. "You have to promise me one more thing."

Ahnaf raised an eyebrow. "What's that?"

"You'll come back with a story. A good one," she said, her lips trembling into a faint smile.

Ahnaf laughed softly, brushing a tear from her cheek. "You've got it. A story just for you. But only if you promise to wait here for me with Mom. Both of you."

Kelly nodded, her sobs subsiding as she buried her face against his shoulder. "Deal. Just... come back."

Ahnaf glanced between the two most important women in his life, his resolve steeling. "I will."

Ahnaf's smartwatch started beeping, cutting through the emotional atmosphere like a sharp knife. The sudden noise made Kelly jump slightly, her teary eyes shifting to the device strapped to his wrist.

Ahnaf glanced at the screen and sighed. "A call," he muttered, moving to sit on the nearby sofa with Kelly following closely. He tapped the screen to answer.

"Hello?"

Leonis's familiar, slightly amused voice came through. "Ah, Ahnaf... good to know you're still awake."

Ahnaf raised an eyebrow. "I mean, it's not that late. So, what's this about?"

Leonis's tone shifted, turning more serious. "The Nexus Crystal... it's been humming like crazy since yesterday."

Ahnaf leaned forward, a spark of concern crossing his face. "Wait, humming? Why? It hummed the same way back at the airfield during that mess with that evil gypsy witch!"

Leonis chuckled dryly. "I thought the same thing, but if those shadows wanted to make a move, they'd have done so by now."

Ahnaf frowned, his voice tightening. "So, did you deduce anything? Figure out what's going on?"

Leonis sighed. "No, not exactly. But I managed to use it to my advantage."

Ahnaf narrowed his eyes, curiosity creeping into his tone. "What do you mean, 'use it to your advantage'?"

"You'll understand when you get here. It's better if I show you," Leonis replied. Then he added, almost offhandedly, "Also, bring your su-oh, wait. I forgot you don't have one. Should I arrange something?"

Ahnaf smirked faintly, leaning back. "Nah, leave it. I'll just wear my jacket and mask. I'll wait for Ramsey to make it."

Leonis snorted. "Well, suit yourself. But you're needed at the facility immediately."

Ahnaf's smirk faded as his expression turned serious. "Alright, I'll see you there."

He ended the call and glanced at Kelly, who was watching him intently.

"You're going, aren't you?" she asked softly.

Ahnaf nodded as he stood up, grabbing his jacket from the back of the chair. "Yeah. Something's up, and I need to find out what."

Kelly grabbed his hand, her grip firm, her voice soft but filled with worry. "Be careful, okay?"

Ahnaf gave her a reassuring smile, his voice calm but resolute. "Always."

Ruvana stepped forward, pulling Ahnaf into a warm, lingering hug. She held him as if trying to shield him from what lay ahead. "Look after yourself, okay?"

"I will, Mom," Ahnaf said gently, his arms tightening around her for a moment before she stepped back.

Ruvana wiped her eyes and offered a weak smile before turning to head back inside, leaving Ahnaf and Kelly standing alone in the doorway.

For a moment, they stood in silence, the weight of unspoken fears pressing down on them. The faint glow of the porch light framed Kelly's tearful face, her eyes locked on his.

Ahnaf looked at her, his usual confidence softening into something raw and vulnerable. "Kelly..." he began, his voice almost breaking.

She stepped closer, shaking her head as tears slipped down her cheeks. "Don't. Don't say goodbye. You're coming back. You have to."

He reached out and pulled her into his arms, holding her so tightly it felt as if he was trying to memorize every detail of her presence-the warmth of her embrace, the way her hair smelled faintly of lavender, the way her heartbeat quickened against his chest.

Kelly leaned into him, her hands clutching his jacket as if letting go would shatter her. "Ahnaf..." her voice was a whisper, trembling with the weight of everything she couldn't say.

"I love you," Ahnaf said, his voice steady but filled with unshakable sincerity.

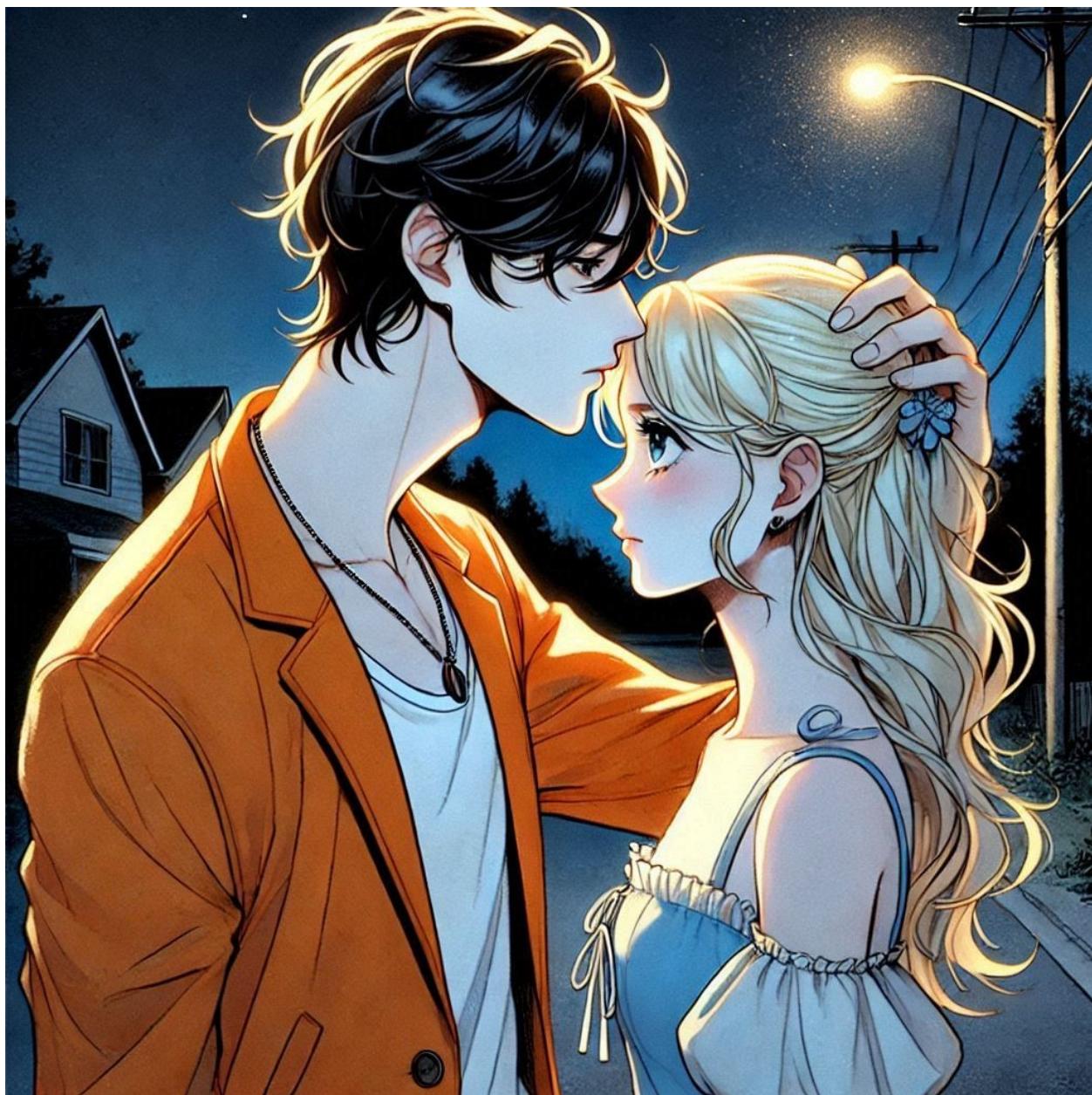
Kelly looked up at him, her face streaked with tears. "I love you too," she whispered, her voice breaking.

He cupped her face, his thumb gently wiping away a tear, and leaned in. Their lips met in a kiss, slow and tender, filled with the desperation of two people clinging to hope in the face of uncertainty.

When they finally pulled apart, Kelly rested her forehead against his, her breath shaky. "Promise me," she murmured. "Promise me you'll come back."

Ahnaf placed a hand over her heart, his own racing beneath her touch. "I'll fight with everything I have. For you. For us. I'll come back. I swear it."

Kelly nodded, her tears falling freely now, but a small, fragile smile broke through her sadness. "You better keep that promise. I'll be waiting."



Ahnaf kissed her forehead, then stepped back, his hands slowly slipping away from hers. "Stay safe. I'll see you soon."

With one last glance at her, he turned and walked away into the night, the sound of his footsteps fading into the distance. Kelly stood in the doorway, watching until he disappeared from view, her hand pressed over her heart where his had been moments before.

"Come back to me," she whispered into the quiet night, her voice carried by the faint breeze.

The Nexus Facility

In the chamber, the usual sterile glow of the overhead lights had been replaced by a faint pink hue emanating from the center of the room. The light pulsed softly, illuminating the stark white walls in a rhythmic, almost hypnotic manner.

Leonis sat in a sleek, high-backed chair, his eyes locked onto the table in front of him. Resting upon its smooth surface were three crystals, each as long as a knife and shimmering with an otherworldly brilliance. Their surfaces seemed to refract the light in impossible ways, casting shifting, dancing shadows across the walls.

Leonis leaned forward, his hands trembling as he reached for the crystals but stopped just short of touching them. He spoke in a hushed, reverent tone, as if addressing something beyond comprehension.

Leonis: "This... this is extraordinary. Otherworldly. No, beyond that. I have no words for it. My whole life, all these centu... never have I seen anything like this. Never could I have imagined it."

He studied the crystals intently, his sharp eyes catching every minuscule detail of their intricate, geometric patterns. His voice dropped lower, barely above a whisper.

Leonis: "To think something like this could be created... from the Nexus Crystal itself. The way it powers these shards, transforming them into... this. What kind of potential lies within the original? If this is what it can do to other objects, what secrets does the Nexus Crystal itself hide-secrets we've never known?"

His breathing quickened as his fingers hovered mere millimeters from the crystalline surface.

Leonis: "It's alive, in a way. I can feel it... pulsing. Waiting. It doesn't belong here, not in this world, not in any world. The Nexus Crystal... it's more than a source of power. It's a gateway to something far beyond our understanding."

The faint pink glow intensified for a moment, casting Leonis's face in stark relief. His lips pressed into a thin line as he leaned back, as though overwhelmed by his own creation.

Leonis: "Power like this... it's not natural. It can't be. To think I've only scratched the surface. These three are just the beginning. But at what cost?"



A knock echoed through the chamber, shattering the silence like a gunshot. Leonis froze, his gaze snapping to the door.

Security Guard: "Director... they're here. Should I let them in?"

Leonis straightened in his chair, his hands finally pulling away from the table. He exhaled slowly, his voice regaining its composure but still tinged with the same cryptic edge.

Leonis: "Yes. Please do."

The guard opened the door, and as footsteps approached, Leonis's gaze returned to the crystals. His lips curled into the faintest of smiles, though his eyes betrayed unease. The pink glow pulsed again, brighter this time, as though the crystals themselves were reacting to the arrival of their new audience.

The chamber glowed faintly, the soft pink light casting strange shadows across the walls. As Ahnaf and I stepped inside, the surreal atmosphere hit me like a wave.

Me: "Whoa, what the voodoo is this?"

Ahnaf stopped just ahead of me, his sharp gaze fixed on the source of the glow.

Ahnaf: "What the hell, Leonis? What's that?"

Leonis stood by the table at the center, his face illuminated by the eerie pink light. His usual cryptic smile was plastered across his face as he gestured toward the glowing crystals with an almost theatrical flair.

Leonis: "Ah, you're here. Perfect timing, boys. This... this is exactly why I called you two."

I tilted my head, the dancing reflections of the pink light off the crystal shards catching my attention.

Me: "To show us... this light show?"

Leonis chuckled, shaking his head with an amused glint in his eye.

Leonis: "Haha, no, Eric. Look closer."

He reached down and delicately picked up one of the crystals. It refracted the pink light as if the glow was alive, swirling within its jagged edges.

Ahnaf: "A glowing crystal?"

The Suburbs

Ruvana: "You sure you want to stay here with me?" Her tone was light but laced with a hint of concern as she glanced at Kelly, sitting beside her with a soft smile.

The two of them sat together on the couch, the quiet comfort of the home a sharp contrast to the turmoil that seemed to linger just out of sight.

Kelly: "Yes, of course." She nodded, though a flicker of hesitation briefly crossed her face.

Ruvana: "You don't need to force yourself, dear. You can go home if you want to..." Her voice trailed off gently.

Kelly: "I want to stay." She smiled faintly, her hands clutching one another in her lap. "Mostly because of Ahnaf. I... I feel safer here, with you." She let out a quiet, nervous laugh. "Besides, my parents are out, and if I went back, I'd be all alone."

Ruvana watched her closely, her gaze softening.

Ruvana: "I'm glad you're here, Kelly. Truly. Ahnaf will be okay I am quite sure of it."

Kelly's expression warmed, but there was still a hint of something unspoken in her eyes. She looked down for a moment, the faint smile lingering.

Kelly: "Thank you. That means a lot."

Ruvana placed a reassuring hand on Kelly's.

Ruvana: "It's going to be all right. As long as we're here together, we'll be okay."

The Nexus Facility

Leonis: "Not just any crystal. This is a crystal imbued with the power of the Nexus Crystal. Powered, if you will, by Amrita."

Ahnaf raised an eyebrow, crossing his arms with a skeptical expression.

Ahnaf: "Amrita? What's that supposed to mean?"

I leaned closer to the table, my curiosity outweighing my initial wariness.

Me: "Alright, you've got my attention. What's the deal with these things?"

Leonis gestured for us to take a seat. Ahnaf and I exchanged a glance, his confident demeanor contrasting my still-surprised one. We both sat down, our eyes fixed on the glowing shards.

Leonis: "Let me explain."

He carefully set the crystal back on the table, his movements deliberate, as though he were handling a live grenade.

Leonis: "The Nexus Crystal has been... restless. Since last evening, it's been emanating energy unlike anything we've observed before. Not radioactive, thankfully, but something... different. Something beyond identification."

Ahnaf leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table, his tone firm.

Ahnaf: "And you've got no idea what it is?"

Leonis sighed, his fingers drumming lightly on the edge of the table as if to steady himself.

Leonis: "We tried for hours. Every instrument, every reading. We brought in the best scientific minds on the planet-brilliant, unparalleled minds. And still... nothing. The energy defied every known parameter, every theory."

Me: "So... what happened? Did you figure it out, or are we still flying blind here?"

Leonis chuckled, though this time there was a nervous undercurrent to his usual playful demeanor.

Leonis: "Funny you should ask. We were packing up for the night, ready to accept defeat for the day. Dr. Youro was the last one to leave, and as he was heading out, he..."

Ahnaf: "He what?"

The Suburbs

Ruvana: "Awwweeee, I didn't want you to miss your vacation with your family because of my Ahnaf." Her tone was warm, with a playful smile as she set her cup of tea down.

Kelly: "Haha, that's okay. Not exactly a vacation," she replied with a light laugh. "Besides, being with Ahnaf is far better, don't you think?"

Ruvana: "Where did they go?"

Kelly: "London. They went to visit my cousin's grandma-she's sick. They'll be back tomorrow, which is why they agreed to let me stay alone for one day." She laughed softly. "I promised I'd be fine."

Ruvana: "Well, then, be sure to go back first thing in the morning." Her smile softened with maternal concern. "I don't want them to worry when they return."

Kelly: "I will. Thank you for letting me stay here tonight."

Ruvana: "Of course, dear. You're always welcome."

The Nexus Facility

Leonis smirked faintly, a mix of humor and disbelief crossing his face.

Leonis: "He tripped over a table. Clumsy, really. And in the process, the Nexus Crystal fell from its containment unit."

Ahnaf raised an eyebrow, his skepticism clear.

Ahnaf: "You're telling me all of this happened because someone tripped?"

Leonis nodded, holding up a hand as if to stop any further disbelief.

Leonis: "As absurd as it sounds, yes. When the Nexus Crystal hit the floor, there was an immediate surge-an explosion of pink energy. It flooded the room with such force that it knocked Dr. Yoru unconscious."

I blinked, leaning back in my chair, my mind struggling to process the implications.

Me: "Wait... so is Yoru okay?"

Leonis: "He's unconscious. But we've already run every test on him. His body is functioning normally-no trace of radiation, no abnormalities. Physically, he's fine. But here's where it gets interesting."

He pointed at the three crystals lying on the table.

Leonis: "These were just ordinary crystals, sitting nearby for unrelated experiments. When the surge hit, they transformed."

Ahnaf leaned closer, his brow furrowing as he studied the shards.

Ahnaf: "Transformed how?"

Leonis: "Their molecular structure is unrecognizable now. They're no longer... normal. These crystals can store and channel energy in ways we've never seen. They're harder than diamond, sharper than any blade, and..."

Leonis paused, his expression darkening as his words trailed off.

Me: "And?"

Leonis: "They emit a faint pulse. Like they're alive. Like they're... waiting for something."

The room fell into silence, the steady hum of the pink energy filling the air.

Ahnaf: "And you're sure this is all because of the Nexus Crystal?"

Leonis nodded, his cryptic smile returning. His eyes gleamed with an unsettling intensity as he leaned forward, his fingers trembling slightly as he gripped the edge of the table.

The Suburbs

Ruvana glanced at her phone, a flicker of realization crossing her face. She stood up from the couch, brushing her hands off on her dress.

Ruvana: "Oh, I almost forgot! I need to drop off some food for Mrs. Patel across the street. She's been under the weather lately, and I promised to bring her something homemade. I should've done it earlier, but time just slipped away."

Kelly looked up, surprised.

Kelly: "At this hour? Isn't it late?"

Ruvana chuckled softly, waving a hand.

Ruvana: "I know, I know. But she's an insomniac and a night owl-I've dropped things off late before. Plus, it's soup. If I wait until morning, it won't be as fresh."

Kelly smiled at the thoughtfulness.

Kelly: "You're sweet, Auntie Ruvana. Alright, but don't keep her chatting too long! You know how she gets."

Ruvana laughed, grabbing a small container from the counter.

Ruvana: "Oh, don't worry, I'll keep it quick. Lock the door while I'm gone, alright? I'll be back in no time."

Kelly: "Got it."

Ruvana headed for the door, her steps light, while Kelly stayed behind

The Nexus Facility

Leonis: "But this is where things get more interesting."

I raised an eyebrow, unsure of what to expect next.

Me: "How?"

Leonis's gaze shifted to the three glowing crystals on the table, his tone dropping to something more ominous.

Leonis: "This crystal... it can penetrate anything. Anything at all."

Ahnaf chuckled, but there was a hint of disbelief in his voice.

Ahnaf: "Huh, really?"

Leonis's smile remained, but there was a certain weight behind it now.

Leonis: "Yes, and not just that. It has the power to completely obliterate the immune system of any individual."

Ahnaf's brow furrowed, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

Ahnaf: "But how do you know it can do that? Did something happen to the scientist?"

Leonis shook his head, his face a mixture of excitement and tension.

Leonis: "No, but... I have my ways of finding out."

His hands were trembling even more now, his usual confident demeanor starting to crack. The weight of whatever secret he was carrying seemed to settle on him like a heavy burden.

Leonis: "And these... these are the answer to our problem."

I leaned forward, my curiosity piqued.

Me: "What problem? Wait... now it's starting to make sense."

Leonis's eyes flickered to Ahnaf and me, his expression hardening, as though he was ready to share the final piece of the puzzle.

Leonis: "Ahnaf, Eric... this is how we stop Khan. Once and for all."

The Suburbs

Kelly lay on the sofa, her head resting against a pillow as the faint hum from outside filled the quiet room. Her thoughts drifted like scattered leaves, tumbling through memories of moments that felt both distant and vivid.

Kelly thinking to herself: *I hope Ahnaf will be okay. I mean... he's been working so hard to master his Code Breaker thing. He's always pushing himself so far.*

A small smile touched her lips as she thought back to last year-the fight in the school cafeteria. It had started over something so silly, yet the chaos that followed had left them all laughing by the end.

Kelly: *He always had this way of finding the humor, even in the middle of madness.*

Her gaze shifted to the keychain hanging on her bag near the corner of the room. She'd gifted it to him last year on the bus-a tiny token she'd chosen after weeks of overthinking.

Kelly: *He said he loved it... barely had a chance to use it, though.*

Her mind jumped to another memory-one of her favorites. That day she handed him a rock, grinning as she asked him to crush it. He'd done it with ease, the fragments crumbling in his hand like powder.

Kelly: *It was silly, really. But moments like that always stuck with me. Just... us... and Eric too!*

She thought about Christmas Eve-the cozy, magical evening they'd shared. The snow had fallen so gently, and the two of them had wandered outside, their breath visible in the cold night air.

Kelly: *it was perfect.*

Her smile faltered slightly as her thoughts landed on the Gypsy tent.

The Nexus Facility

Ahnaf's face was unreadable, but his voice was steady, carrying a hint of skepticism.

Ahnaf: "We're going to defeat him with this?"

Leonis nodded, his eyes burning with conviction.

Leonis: "Yes. We use these on him. They'll strip him of his powers-his healing, everything. Khan will be powerless."

I blinked in surprise as the reality of the situation hit me. The pieces were falling into place, but the plan still felt... incomplete.

Me: "So, I take one, Ahnaf takes one, and... wait-is the third one for James? He's awake?!"

Leonis's face twisted into a somber expression, shaking his head slowly.

Leonis: "No, unfortunately. But my plan is for Ahnaf to use all three."

My mind raced as I tried to make sense of it.

Me: "Huh? But why not me?"

The Suburbs

Kelly stared at the ceiling, her fingers absently tracing the edge of the blanket draped over her. So many memories, so many moments tied to Ahnaf. The warmth they brought felt like a soft glow against her heart, yet it wasn't enough to banish the unease that lingered deep within her.

A whisper of fear crept back into her mind, the words of the Gypsy echoing with an almost haunting clarity.

"Beware, for the trust you place in your beloved will weave the threads of your undoing."

She squeezed her eyes shut, willing the memory away.

Kelly (thinking): *She was just some fortune-teller trying to be mysterious. It didn't mean anything... right?*

But no matter how hard she tried to dismiss it, the words refused to fade. They clawed at her thoughts, dragging her back to that flickering tent and the intense stare of the woman who had spoken them.

Kelly turned her head, her eyes falling on the clock on the wall. The soft ticking seemed louder now, each second echoing in the stillness of the room.

11:59.

The Nexus Facility

Leonis's voice echoed in the chamber, each word weighted with tension.

Leonis: "For one, Eric, you run at Mach 2 speeds. There's no telling what the crystal might do at that velocity. We need Ahnaf's raw strength. Your role is to be there, to ensure things go-"

11:59:45.

The wall clock ticked loudly, its rhythm cutting through the hum of the Nexus crystals. My attention flicked between Leonis and the clock, the seconds dragging on like a countdown to something ominous.

Leonis: "These crystals can be the key, Eric. But we have no margin for error-"

The Suburbs

Kelly shifted on the couch, her eyes wandering toward the clock on the wall. The soft chime of the approaching midnight filled the quiet room.

11:59:15.

She sighed, her fingers tracing the edge of the blanket draped over her legs, her thoughts drifting to Ahnaf.

Kelly thinking: *I hope he's okay.*

Her eyes lingered on the clock, the seconds ticking away slowly.

The Nexus Facility

11:59:30.

Leonis's voice grew sharper as he leaned closer to the table, his expression serious.

Leonis: "Once we activate use crystals, everything changes. You need to-

11:59:40.

The crystals on the table emitted a faint pulse, their pink glow intensifying. I felt the air grow heavier, charged with an unfamiliar energy.

Me: "Leonis... is it me or are these glowing more?"

The Suburbs

11:59:41.

Kelly glanced toward the window, the faint flicker of city lights in the distance calming her unease for a brief moment. She adjusted the blanket around her, trying to shake the strange sense of foreboding.

Kelly thinking: *Maybe I should've called him earlier... just to hear his voice.*

11:59:50.

Her gaze flicked back to the clock, the final seconds of the hour slipping away.

The Nexus Facility

11:59:55.

The crystals pulsed again, brighter this time, casting long, jagged shadows across the walls. Leonis paused mid-sentence, his jaw tightening as he stared at the table.

Leonis: "This energy... it's building up faster than I expected. Is it... reacting to something?"

The silence in the room was deafening, broken only by the tick of the clock.

The Suburbs

11:59:55.

The faint hum of the refrigerator filled the room as Kelly leaned back against the couch, staring at the ceiling. Her thoughts swirled-memories of Ahnaf, their laughter, their shared moments.

Kelly thinking: *We've been through so much. But no matter what happens, I trust him.*

11:59:58.

A faint vibration ran through the floor. Kelly sat up, her eyes narrowing as she glanced toward the window. The vibration came again, stronger this time.

Kelly: "What...?"

The Nexus Facility

11:59:58.

Leonis turned toward me, his voice low and urgent.

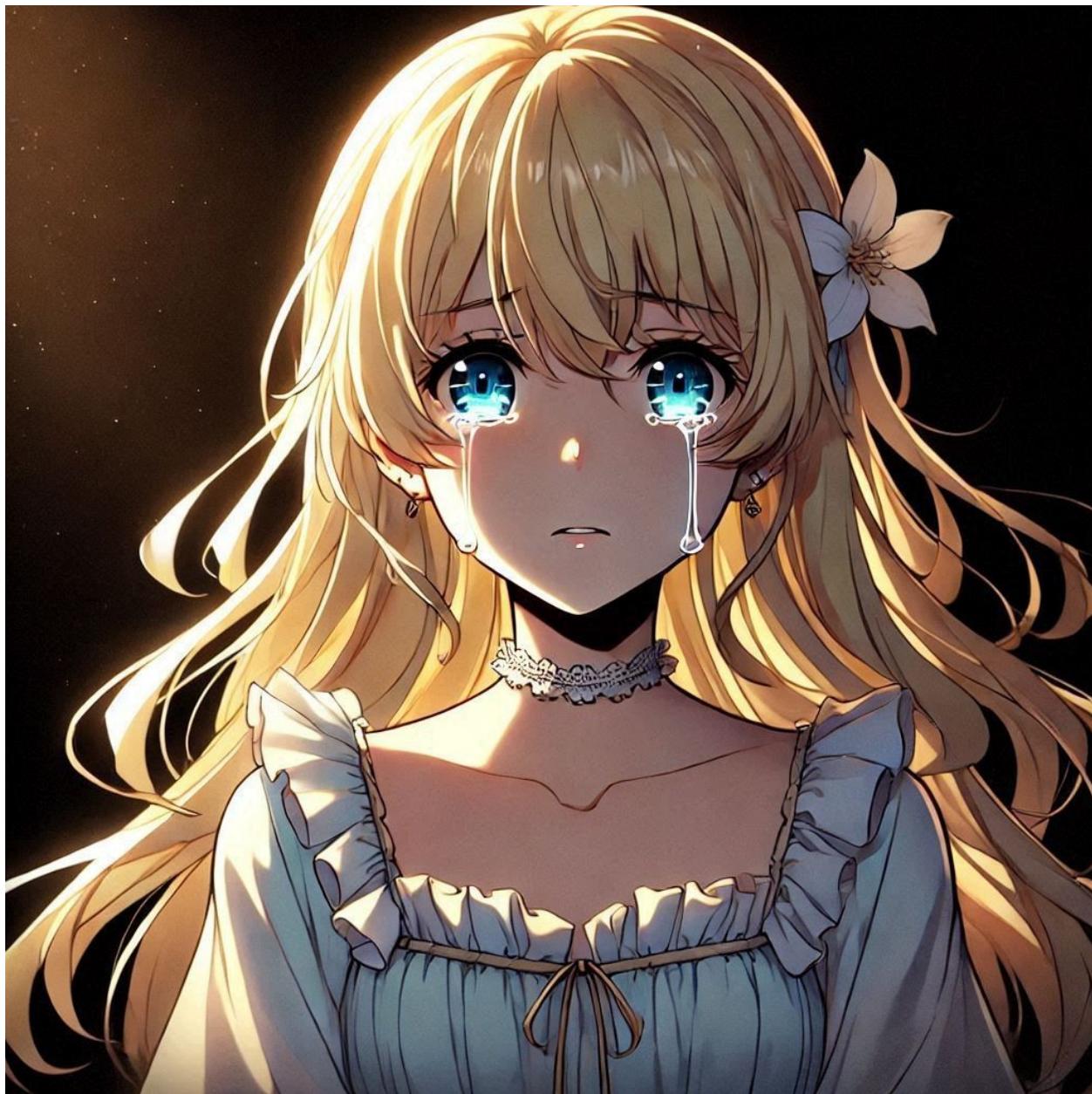
Leonis: "Something's-"

The Suburbs

11:59:59.

The faint vibrations became a sudden, deafening roar. The air around seemed to shift, the quiet suburbs started to shake. And then, a single tear slipped down Kelly's cheek.

The pain of realization hit her in an instant.



'I now know what the words meant.... Ahnaf.... I love-'

The Nexus Facility

12:00:00.

BOOM!

The entire building seemed to tremble as the shockwave ripped through the air. The entire building shuddered violently, as if gripped by an unseen hand. The floor beneath our feet vibrated, and the faint hum of the crystals was drowned out by the deafening roar that exploded from above.

BOOM!

The walls cracked, and dust rained down from the ceiling, the shockwave rattling every surface in the room. A second explosion followed immediately, even more intense than the first. The sound was so loud, it felt like the very air was being torn apart.

BOOM!

The ground shook violently again, and the force of the blast sent us stumbling, our balance thrown off. The lights flickered, and the faint pink glow from the crystals seemed to pulse in sync with the blasts as if reacting to the chaos outside.

Leonis: "WHAT IS GOING ON?!"

Ahnaf's voice, tinged with disbelief, cut through the chaos.

Ahnaf: "No, no, no! How is this happening? Not so soon!"

Without hesitation, Ahnaf grabbed the glowing crystal from the table, quickly securing it in his jacket holster. His hands moved with urgency, his usual confidence replaced by a dangerous intensity.

Leonis, now frantic, rushed to the wall and flicked a switch on the large screen. The feed flickered for a moment before revealing the devastation above ground. Leeds, the city we had sworn to protect, was engulfed in flames.

Me: "NOOOOOO!!! NO WAY!!!!"

The reality of the situation hit me like a punch to the gut. I darted for the lift, my feet pounding against the floor as I tried to process the chaos around me. Ahnaf was right behind me, his footsteps heavy, like the sound of a storm barreling toward us. I could feel the change in him, the surge of power-something primal awakening within him as he followed.

Leonis's voice echoed behind us, his command sharp and urgent.

Leonis: "Eric!!! SAVE THE CIVILIANS! SAVE EVERYONE!!! LET AHNAF STOP WHATEVER THIS THREAT IS!!!"

I barely heard his words as the lift doors closed and the world seemed to close in around us. There was no time to waste. My pulse quickened. I had to act fast.

The lift jerked downward, the floor beneath our feet vibrating from the explosions still ringing in my ears. When the doors opened, we were met with the sight of destruction. But more than that-Ahnaf. His fists clenched tightly at his sides, his anger palpable in the air. The raw emotion and power radiating off him were like a storm breaking free.

I stood beside him, but even from this close, I could feel the ominous presence that surrounded him.

As the lift doors slid open, the intensity of the outside world crashed into me. The smell of smoke, the heat, the chaos-everything hit at once. Ahnaf's voice was low but desperate.

Ahnaf: "Eric..."

Me: "Yes?"

Ahnaf's words were strained, his voice trembling with urgency.

Ahnaf: "Carry me quickly to my home!"

Without hesitation, I grabbed Ahnaf and hoisted him onto my back. My muscles burned from the speed, but I pushed forward. The city streets were a warzone-a nightmarish scene of devastation.

The firestorm that had consumed Leeds was everywhere. Buildings crumbled into nothingness as flames licked the sky. The streets, once bustling with life, were now ravaged, choked with smoke and ash. Cars had melted into heaps of twisted metal, and the air crackled with the heat.

The suburbs, which had once been safe havens, were nothing more than hellscapes now. Fire poured from windows, the flames dancing violently, threatening to devour anything they could. Streets that were once lined with trees now lay charred and broken. It was like a nightmare made real.

My legs pushed harder, my mind focused only on getting Ahnaf to his home. I couldn't bear the thought of what we might find, but it was the only thing left to do.

Then, I saw it. Ahnaf's house. But it wasn't the home I remembered. I stood there shocked.

The roof had caved in, and the structure of the house was reduced to a skeleton. Flames erupted from every window, twisting like angry serpents. The walls were broken, and debris littered the ground. The once-warm and inviting home was now a funeral pyre.

Ahnaf didn't wait. He leaped from my back and ran towards the wreckage, as if the house might somehow give him the answers he sought. His body moved like a machine, unstoppable, driven by something deeper than instinct-by love, by desperation.

Ahnaf's heart pounded as he pushed through the smoke, every step more urgent than the last. He called out again, his voice strained with panic.

Ahnaf: "MOM!!!"

The sound of his voice barely cut through the roar of the fire. The flames twisted higher, consuming everything they could reach.

Ahnaf: "KELLY!!!"

The structure groaned under the weight of the fire, and just when it seemed like he might be swallowed whole by the inferno, Ahnaf pushed deeper into the wreckage. He barely noticed the debris, the heat, the way the smoke burned his lungs. He moved with a single purpose.

Then, through the haze, something stopped him.



His eyes locked onto something—or rather, someone.

A burnt body lay sprawled among the charred remains of the house. The fire had consumed most of it, but there was no mistaking the faint outline of a blue frock.

The lifeless shell where once there was warmth and hope today.

The blue frock, torn and charred, the same frock that had danced in the wind today.

The same frock that carried her laughter, her spirit, the essence of who she was today.

The same person who held Ahnaf's hand with unwavering trust today.

The same hands that wove their shared dreams, hands that swore loyalty and love today.

The same love that had burned brightly between them, the love they nurtured together today.

The same dreams and promises that now lay in ruins, never to come to fruition today.

The same promises, promises that will never be fulfilled today.

It was Kelly.

The woman who had stood beside him through every storm, the one he had loved with every fiber of his being, the one he had dreamed of a future with. She was gone.

Ahnaf's world crumbled in that moment.

His chest tightened as he stared at her lifeless form, the flames dancing cruelly around her. The woman he had promised to protect, to cherish, was now reduced to nothing more than a broken, burnt memory. The life he had envisioned-one full of shared laughter, adventures, and quiet nights-was gone.

Ahnaf: "Kelly... no... please... you can't be gone. You can't..."

His voice cracked, the words barely escaping as his throat tightened in agony. His hands, slick with the sweat of desperation, trembled as he reached for her, his heart shattering with each second that passed. The fire's heat didn't touch him anymore, not with the emptiness that consumed him. He had nothing left to fight for. She was everything. And now, she was nothing.

His body trembled violently, his mind unable to process the loss. It was too much. The agony crushed him, leaving him breathless, struggling to keep it together.

The weight of grief crushed his chest, suffocating him like a thick blanket. It was a grief so profound, so raw, that he felt as though he would collapse under its weight. And yet, it was a grief that burned within him-fueled by love, fueled by rage.

Ahnaf: "NOOOOOOOOO!!!"

His scream tore through the flames, a guttural, anguished cry that reverberated through the wreckage, through the city. It was a sound of pure devastation, the kind of cry only born from losing everything. The world around him, the fire, the ruins, none of it mattered anymore. Kelly, the woman who had filled his life with light and warmth, was gone.

The flames, the smoke, the destruction-they all felt distant now.

Ahnaf's scream faded, swallowed by the fire, but inside him, the silence was deafening. The world around him fell away, leaving only the agony of his heart.

And then, he began to rise. Slowly. His knees trembled, but his resolve solidified. His back straightened as though something deeper than his grief was pulling him up. Something colder. Something unstoppable.

In the stillness, Ahnaf's hands tightened around Kelly's burnt body. He held her as gently as he could, even with the fiery pain of his loss. His eyes lingered on her one last time, memorizing the traces of her-before the fire had taken her. He would not leave her here. He couldn't.

With one final, silent promise to himself, Ahnaf leaped.

The ground beneath him seemed to shatter as he propelled himself into the air, Kelly's body still clutched to his chest. His powerful legs shot them both upward, breaking through the smoke and the ash, into the sky above the flames. He moved like a force of nature, his fury and sorrow propelling him higher, cutting through the night like a comet. The wind howled, and the earth below him trembled in his wake.

The world seemed to disappear as he flew upward, the roar of the city and the fire lost beneath him. For just a moment, everything was still.

Boom.

Ahnaf landed beside me with a force that shook the earth itself. Dust and debris erupted from the impact, scattering into the night as the shockwave of his landing spread outward. The earth itself trembled beneath him. He barely seemed to notice.

Without a word, without a pause, Ahnaf gently laid Kelly's burnt body down beside me. His hands, slick with sweat and grief, carefully arranged her on the ground, as if laying her down one last time.

His eyes met mine-no words passed between us, but the raw anguish and fiery rage in his eyes were enough. They burned with a fury I had never seen before. But in those eyes, there was also something darker. Something more dangerous.

His chest heaved with every breath, and his fists were still clenched, knuckles white. But there was something different now-something primal had awokened within him, something that could never be tamed.

He had lost everything. His love. His future. And with it, his restraint.

Without a word, Ahnaf turned. His body blurred as he launched himself back toward the city, the force of his movement cracking the air. His eyes were locked on something-something only he could see, some goal that I couldn't begin to understand.

But one thing was clear.

A primal rage burned in his soul.

And there was no stopping him now.

He looked at the city, the ruins, the wreckage. Everything he had ever known had been torn apart. And in that moment, Ahnaf knew that nothing, no one, could ever hold him back again. Not the pain, not the loss, not even the world itself.

The silence in the air was deafening, but it was his now. And in the wreckage of his world, he would find the strength to rebuild-on his own terms.

No more hesitation.

No more mercy.

Only the fire of vengeance.

I saw him jump again, soaring high toward the city. The wind howled as his form disappeared into the clouds, a blur of fury and power. His leap felt like the earth itself was shaking beneath him, and the energy in the air was palpable, heavy with the weight of everything he was about to do.

The rain started to fall then. First in droplets, and then heavier, like the heavens themselves were mourning the devastation. At least the rain would stop the flames. It wouldn't be enough to heal the damage, but it would save whatever was left of the city from burning down completely.

But I didn't have the luxury of time to waste. I had to move. I had to act. But then....

A flash of pink light, radiating from the side, cutting through the haze of smoke and chaos.

I froze.

A voice, soft yet cutting through the air, spoke.

"Excuse me, Miss, is this your home?"

I blinked, disoriented, but then, like a bolt from the blue, I heard another voice I hadn't expected.

"Eric!!!"

It was Ms. Ruvana.



Relief surged through me as I turned to her, finally seeing her clearly amidst the smoke and rain. She was safe. Her clothes, slightly singed from the chaos, were intact, and a faint pink aura pulsed around her, a protective barrier keeping her untouched by the surrounding destruction.

But then my eyes caught the person standing beside her, and suddenly, the air grew thick with something I couldn't place. My chest tightened, a weight settled heavily in the pit of my stomach. It felt like the **gravity** around me was slowly, steadily increasing, like the very world around me had turned from light to something darker, heavier.

I swallowed hard, struggling to breathe as my gaze locked onto her.

She was cloaked in a hoodie, but even that couldn't disguise the unmistakable glow that emanated from her. Her eyes-**those glowing pink eyes**-stared at me.

Time seemed to slow as I took in the familiar, haunting presence. The weight of the moment pressed down on me, the rain falling in slow motion, the surrounding destruction fading into the background. I felt a surge of disbelief, confusion, and something else. A storm was brewing inside me, something both familiar and terrifying.

The world felt like it was on the edge of some precipice, teetering between what was real and what was impossible.

I blinked, trying to make sense of it, but the reality of the situation was suffocating. Before I could speak, my heart dropped. The recognition hit me like a freight train.

No. It couldn't be.

"You!!!!"

